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FOR A REALIST DEFINITION OF SOCIAL MOVEMENTS

(paper prepared for the conference "Debating Realism(s)",
Roskilde University, Denmark, 17-19 August 2001)

1 - Protest or social movements?

There lies a barely recognized dissent over the definition of social movement in the sociological literature. In the U.S. tradition of study in the field, social movements are either defined as the occurrence of protest events (or waves), or as collective actors who are engaged in protest activity, namely outside the institutional channels of political representation.[1] This double definition can be alternatively found or can coexist within the same theoretical approach to the study of social movements. My aim in this section is to question this equivalence between protest and the notion of social movement that is contained in both variants of the definition.

An example where the first variant of this definition can be seen as employed is the piece of research by the Tillys on popular violence in Germany, France and Italy (Tilly *et al.* 1975). The research strategy pursued by Charles Tilly and his associates begins with the collection of events of political violence from newspaper sources (ibidem: 56). They then proceed to explain the occurrence of protest waves[2] from 1830 to 1930 by considering the co-variation of protest events with other variables such as indices of economic hardship and social disorganization (ibidem: 75; 80 and 247). Tilly intends to criticize two other theories on popular violence in U.S. sociology: the relative deprivation theory and the collective behavior approach (Gurney and Tierney 1982; Marx and Wood 1975). The former argued for the actual (or perceived) sense of material (or symbolic) deprivation in relation to other groups, as causes of protest events or social movements. The latter explained the occurrence of the same phenomena as the reaction to sudden and wide-ranging processes of change such as industrialization and urbanization.

As opposed to these two general theories of protest and social movements, Tilly claims to have discovered the correspondence between the occurrence of protest waves and major processes of change in the political system (Till *et al.* 1975: 56). With Tilly a new approach in the study of social movements is outlined, setting as focus of empirical investigation the relationship between the institutional political system and the excluded groups.[3] These are defined as "challengers", since they are

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[1] For different definitions of social movement which have strongly inspired the argument put forward in this paper, see Touraine (1985; 1988: 63-74); Farro (2000).

[2] "a sequence of escalating collective action exhibiting greater frequency and intensity than normal" (Mc Clurg Muller 1992: 14). Read protest for collective action.

interested in the resources which are controlled by the "members" of the polity. Being excluded from the latter, they need to have recourse to costly, non-institutional means such as protest (Tilly 1978: 52-3; Zald 1992).

It can be argued that Tilly and scholars sharing a similar perspective (see e.g. Gamson 1975) mark an advance in the U.S. debate on social movements, as they lay emphasis on the part played by agency in the construction of social movements. According to the "political process model", participants in social movements neither are reacting to processes of deprivation in behaviourist fashion, according to the "frustration-aggression" link (Gurney and Tierney 1982: 43), nor are trying to make sense of alterations in their daily routines (Turner and Killian 1987: 7 and 26). They are pursuing their interests by rational means, needing to mobilize resources in order to self-organize for their aims. Modifying insights coming from the resource mobilization theory, McAdam reaches similar conclusions as Tilly in his study of the Civil Rights Movement. "Emerging, as they do, among excluded groups, social movements embody an implicit demand for more influence in political decision-making"; namely, they aim at "a restructuring of polity membership" (McAdam 1982: 26).

Two objections can be raised against the "political process model". The first objection applies to Tilly's method and follows the two-fold - ontological and epistemological - critique that transcendental realism puts forward against empiricist social (and natural) science (Bhaskar 1978 and 1989; Manicas 1989). On epistemological grounds, realism allows us to criticize Tilly's methodology of verifying causal relations on the basis of detecting empirical regularities. As realists are familiar with, such a procedure is only correct in the artificial setting of experimental closure, a possibility which is ruled out in the irreducibly open social world. This remark can be extended to question, on ontological grounds, the very possibility of finding one general explanation for the occurrence of protest events or waves, as for example when the U.S. debate on social movements is summarized as a dilemma over whether the decisive factor for the occurrence of protest is the actuality of grievances or the availability of resources (Jenkins 1983). If events are complex, as realists are aware of,[4] explanation can only start from their analytical dissection.

The second objection tackles the other variant of the definition suggested by the U.S. tradition in this sociological sub-field. As seen in McAdam's definition above, social movements are considered to be as collective actors trying to mobilize constituencies which are excluded from the political system. A picture of (national) societies is assumed where groups are portrayed as competing for the resources which are under the control of the government. Thus the distinction between interest groups and social movements is equated with the position of inclusion or exclusion of constituent groups and their organizations in relation to the polity. In section 3 I will suggest a different definition of social movements, which is based on recognizing the analytical

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[3] For a recent application of this research strategy to the empirically-defined "new social movements", see Kriesi *et al.* (1995).   .

[4] As Bhaskar (1978: 277) argues, "ordinary things may be conceived, metaphysically, as *compounds*. This allows to make sense of the *individuality* of historical particulars; just as the conception of ordinary events as 'conjunctures' allows to make sense of the uniqueness of historical events".

autonomy of the dynamics of domination, resistance and antagonism at the level of civil society (cf. also Lapeyronnie 1988). As empirical evidence, I will utilize historiographical sources on the labour movement and popular politics in Britain, at different moments during the 19th century.

In fact, an historical argument on popular politics is also contained in Tilly's work, both in his research on Continental Europe and in a later study on popular politics in Britain from 1758 to 1834 (Tilly 1995). Even though the timing is different in the large European countries considered, Tilly discerns a qualitative change in popular protest at some point during the 19th century. Coinciding with the process of working-class formation and its entrance into the political arena, new repertoires of action are employed (petitions, demonstrations, strikes, mass meetings), replacing previous forms of popular mobilization, such as the urban food riot and the spontaneous land occupation (Tilly *et al.* 1975: 84; 158; 253; 276).

Tilly explains this process with a change in the structure of political opportunities for popular collective action (Tilly 1995: in partic. 337). In Britain, for example, the involvement of the state in warfare activities in the late-18th and early-19th century brought about an increased importance of parliament in relation to the other constitutional powers, given the state's growing need for resources (ibidem: 195). As a consequence, whereas in the 18th century plebeian contention was confined to a local dimension, the early 19th century witnessed "working-class attempts to acquire a share of national power" (ibidem: 331). Furthermore, in the nineteenth-century "repertoire", popular participation in "contentious gatherings" took place as "members or representatives of special interests ... and named associations", unlike in the previous century as "members or representatives of constituted corporate groups and communities" (ibidem: 363; see also Tilly *et al.* 1975: 276). Whereas in the 18th century plebeians "appealed to powerful patrons for redress of wrongs" (Tilly 1995: 363), the creation of national polities gave them the opportunity to move away from the defensive standpoint of resisting the social change brought about by capitalism and State-making. Thus popular stata took a more "pro-active" and autonomous outlook. They engaged in their self-organization in order to make claims over the resources which were under the control of those social groups already in the polity (Tilly *et al.* 1975: 252-4).

Tilly then posits a perfect overlapping between the emergence of autonomous popular politics and the rise of the politics of interests. Consequently, the occurrence of protest waves and the formation of social movements are argued to depend on the relative position to the political system, with "social movement politics" being defined as a kind of campaign "outside the bounds of routine politics", whose prototype in the British experience can be identified with O'Connell's Catholic Association (Tilly 1982: 45-6; 1995: 214 and 278-9).

A revised definition of social movement might instead be crucial for a different reconstruction of the emergence of autonomous popular action in early-19th century Britain. In section 2 I will consider some controversies in the historiography of the popular movement culminating with the Chartist wave of protest. I will provide a definition of popular movement as characterized by a double process: on the one hand, of popular strata developing autonomous collective action and, on the other

hand, of the collective action of different strata being integrated into same movement. The definition of social movement put forward in section 3 will be utilized to assess these controversies, through the analysis of the relationship between social and political conflict in the actual popular movement which developed in early-19th century Britain.

2 - <u>Complexity of popular movements</u>

The same process that Tilly attempts to explain is analysed by E.P. Thompson in his seminal work (1980; 1st edition: 1963). Marking a turning point in British historiography, Thompson's "history from below" sets as its programme the retrieval of the capacity that popular strata had in the past both to articulate a critical discourse and to self-organize (cf. also Archer 1995: 258). As he puts it, by 1816 it had become possible "for individual working men to have a sense - not just of sporadic crowd turbulence - but of sustained commitment to a movement" (Thompson 1980: 938).

Thompson retraces the development of an <u>autonomous</u> discourse by popular strata. As signposts in this process, he first points out the artisans' break with utilitarian political economy, highlighting the part played by the London-based *Trades' Newspaper* (Thompson 1980: 853-5). Thompson then shows how, thanks mainly to the influence of Cobbett's *Political Register*, the declining textile hand-workers in the North combined their anti-factory arguments with a refusal of deference and the assertion of democratic independence (ibidem: 326; 338; 509 and 577). On the organizational level as well, the autonomy of Chartist localities can be recalled. "Their direct democracy and dislike of control by gentlemen" exhibited "a desire for self-government and independence" that can be contrasted with the volatility of the eighteenth-century crowd, susceptible to be manipulated by factions within the elite for their own internal feuds (Prothero 1969: 86; Thompson 1993: 91; Colley 1982: 11-2).

On grounds that will be discussed in section 5, Thompson's definition of this process as "the making of the working class" can be said to engender confusion. However, what seems to me as an important acquisition of Thompson's scholarship is his emphasis on class as a construction, as the result of agency, as the "process of self-discovery and self-definition" thanks to which "the working class made itself as much as it was made" (Thompson 1980: 939 and 213). His definition that a group of people can be defined as class when they "have a disposition to behave as a class, to define themselves in their actions and in their consciousness in relation to other groups of people in class ways" (ibidem: 939), opens the way both for investigating the social relations in which people are embedded, and for taking seriously into account the discourse which is articulated by the participants to a movement.

The empirical point made in Thompson's seminal work is that an action informed with class consciousness would have been made by the early 1830s, and it is the diachronic process leading to that outcome that he intends to reconstruct (ibidem: 212 and 939). This picture of class, which would then be formed by the time of the

mobilizations for Reform in the early 1830s and then by Chartism ten years later[5], has been questioned in subsequent studies, such as by Stedman Jones on the language of Chartism and by Joyce on Lancashire in late Victorian years (Stedman Jones 1983: 90-178; Joyce 1992). Their criticism is not only on empirical grounds, but aims to question the theoretical presuppositions underpinning Thompson's historiography. Drawing on board the 'linguistic turn' performed in social theory, Stedman Jones strongly argues against the determination of political discourse by social being which Thompson's account of class would postulate (Stedman Jones 1983: 101). The more recent critical attack by Joyce is premised on a definition of class as a discourse which has recourse to economic categories and presents itself in sectional claims (Joyce 1992: 11). Since both are lacking in the "vision of social order" endorsed by late-Victorian workers in Lancashire, his conclusion is that their discourse should rather be characterized as "populist" (ibidem). However, one important point of Thompson's scholarship that Joyce neglects, is his argument that the emergence of class action and discourse is also an <u>integrative</u> process, being able to foster the convergence into one common action of people who were previously seeing their own condition as heterogeneous.[6] Class would then be this movement from the particularity of a situation to the definition of a wider identity, with such a definition entailing, at the same time, the challenge to the power position of a social group defined as opponent.[7]

My suggestion would be to define as <u>popular</u> <u>movement</u> the outcome of this two-dimensional process: on the one hand, the integration in the collective action of popular strata; on the other the definition of both an autonomous discourse and independent organizations. If such a definition is general, encompassing different historical actualities, it might be useful as a methodological suggestion to attempt the interpretation of the actual, located in space-time, popular movement whose process of formation Thompson reconstructs.

In his influential interpretation, Stedman Jones forcefully argues for the political nature of Chartism in controversy with Thompson's emphasis on class. The latter argues that "the vote implied also further claims: a new way of reaching out by the working people for *social control* over their conditions of life and labour" (1980: 910; original emphasis), whereas in Jones's interpretation "Chartism was a political movement. ... A political movement ... its existence is distinguished by a shared

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[5] "The 'oucome' of this period of 'making' lies beyond this book, in the Chartist years..." (Thompson 1980: 937).

[6] "I have tried to distinguish between the experiences of different groups - artisans, outworkers, and labourers - and to show how they were coming to act, think, and feel, not in the old modes of deference and parochial seclusion, but in class ways. ... In the Chartist years ... these several groups found common institutions, programmes, forms of action, and modes of thought" (Thompson 1980: 937). Thompson's parallel emphasis on the dimension of autonomy can also be noticed here.

[7] "Class happens when some men, as a result of common experiences (inherited or shared), feel and articulate the identity of their interests as between themselves, and as against other men whose interests are different from (and usually opposed to) to theirs" (Thompson 1980: 8-9).

conviction articulating a political solution to distress and a political diagnosis to its causes" (Stedman Jones 1983: 96), an argument which is also endorsed by Joyce.[8]

This interpretative disagreement is, on the one hand, decisive for explaining the decline of the popular movement during the decades subsequent to the final defeat of Chartism in 1848, as will be seen in the next sections. In Stedman Jones's view, it was the opening of the political system during Peel's government of the 1840s, its (albeit mild) intervention in protecting workers' condition, in abolishing hated taxation such as the Corn Law, and more generally in rationalizing state administration, that made irrelevant the critique against "Old Corruption" (Stedman Jones 1983: 175-8).

On the other hand, Jones's interpretation is premised on an assumption of continuity between Chartist discourse and the eighteenth-century tradition which criticized the corruption of political power in the name of the "free-born Englishman" (ibidem: in part. 96 and 110).[9] However, as he does not fail to underscore, the popular movement was increasingly composed of working men, especially after the 1832 Act (ibidem: 165). Therefore, the interpretation of Chartism needs to carefully balance continuities and "shifts in register" within the discourse of the popular movement (Gray 1986: 370). As another historian has argued, the "analysis of society" was always in terms of "the nation against the government", but " 'people' in 1832 did not mean the same as in 1792, and was being re-defined to mean working or labouring people" (Prothero 1974: 135 and 143).

The explanation of the popular movement that reaches its apex in Chartism should then abandon the search for its supposedly one-dimensional nature and begin, on the contrary, by acknowledging its complexity (see Gray 1986: 373). Thompson's work might also be seen as the reconstruction of the different empirical components which came to constitute the movement: mainly the urban artisans, the Radicals, the northern communities and the "unskilled masses in London" (see note 6). The Chartist wave of protest can thus be interpreted as the peak of the popular movement, because in those years the integration among these components reached its highest point, both in the single localities[10] and among them, as the movement acquired a definite national dimension (Tilly 1995: 339). Thus explanation should proceed to the analysis of each empirical component and, then, to assess the actual relationship which was established among them (dimension of integration). Historical analyses suggest to focus particularly on the relationship between the political programme of Chartism and the social struggles of artisans aimed at preserving or regaining control over their own

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[8] "For the rank and file as for the radical leadership, the source to social injustice lies in the political sphere" (Joyce 1992: 64).

[9] On the complexity of the tradition of English Radicalism, see Parssinen (1973) and Belchem (1981), where the further influence of the rationalist argument inaugurated by Tom Paine is assessed. The decisive contribution made by Paine's political thought to the development of an autonomous discourse by popular strata, is strongly argued by Thompson (1980; see also his 1968). The Radical denounciation of "corrupt and exclusive legislation" (Prothero 1969: 59) is the link between the critiques of "Old Corruption" and of the exclusion of popular strata from the institutional political system.

[10] See Prothero (1969: in part. 101) for London and Sykes (1982) for south-east Lancashire.

work and life. My aim, which will be postponed until section 5, is to explain the combination between, on the one hand, the importance of artisan culture for the "social vision" of Chartism (Epstein 1986: 203) and, on the other hand, the fact that, in the wake of Stedman Jones's interpretation, "Chartism ... was 'about' the six points to a greater extent that is usually acknowledged" (Gray 1986: 368). In the next section the empirical component of artisans' collective action will be considered. The aim is to show how it decisively sustained the dimension of autonomy within the popular movement as a whole.

3 - <u>Social movement as logic of action</u>

In the last section the important part that urban artisans played for the articulation of an autonomous discourse by popular strata was hinted to, while this autonomy was considered to be as one of the two dimensions that allows us to detect the actuality of a popular movement in early-19th century Britain. The relevance of urban artisans within the popular movement culminating in Chartism has been stressed by Thompson and subsequent historians (Prothero 1969 and 1971; Sykes 1982; Rule 1986; Behagg 1990). Craftsmen were resisting the initiatives of merchant capitalists and owners who aimed to alter the customs of the trade through the introduction either of unskilled, female and juvenile labour, and/or of technological innovation (Behagg 1990: 9). From resistance, which itself cannot be reduced to a behaviourist reaction (cf. Scott 1990), artisans moved to structure collective action. This is to be considered empirically wider than the occurrence of protest events recorded in newspapers and, furthermore, cannot be interpreted solely as distributive conflict, moved by a mere logic of maximizing or defending interests **(Pizzorno 1978 and 1981). The defense of interests is to be seen within a wider conflict through which** craftsmen tried to contend with their opponents for the control over the field of work relations (cf. also Price 1982).

Whilst engaged in such a conflict artisans worked out a labour identity which was wider than the identity of the single trade and "hardly thinkable in the eighteenth-century context" (Rule 1986: 289; 1987: 118). Employers' initiatives of change concerned chiefly the control of the labour market in sectors such as tailoring, shoe-making and cotton weaving. In actuality, craftsmen's collective action pivoted around the defense of apprenticeship, which was decisive for the control over both wage rates and work organization (Rule 1987). This is shown *a contrario* by the fate of Lancashire hand-loom weavers who, unable to self-organize at the level of labour relations, firstly suffered from dramatic wage reductions and then were decimated by the introduction of the power-loom (Thompson 1980: 327-8; Rule 1986: 10 and 37).

Two analytical components can then be highlighted in the labour action of artisans. On the one hand, a mere <u>logic</u> of <u>interests</u>, which in itself, as has been argued, can be rendered compatible with the acceptance of social power, producing "a set of give-and-take interactions, in which each side bargains for a set of more or less limited objectives" (Allmond and Powell: 57; see also Pizzorno 1987). On the other hand, in early-19th century Britain, "tailors, shoe-makers and building craftsmen" upheld their struggle with a general critique of social order in which change was controlled by their

opponents. They also articulated the utopia of a society which could get rid of "middlemen" and "dishonourable" masters, where production and especially distribution would be under the control of self-managed communities (Thompson 1980: 856-7 and 887; Prothero 1971: 207; Rule 1986: 292-5; Behagg 1990: 78-82; Joyce 1992: 64).

Thus a further analytical component can be discerned within the actual action of artisans during these decades. My suggestion is to define this component as <u>logic of social movement</u>, coexisting with a logic of interests within labour action. It is this component which structures antagonistic labour conflict.[11] Thanks to the general critique articulated in their discourse, craftsmen viewed their local or particular mobilizations as linked to a nation-wide social conflict. Thanks to a utopia envisaging to transcend social order and bring about an emancipated society, labour action contained a claim to absolute power. Therefore it was this component of antagonistic labour action which sustained craftsmen's search for alternative discourses to orthodox political economy, and their aspiration to independent organizations - trade and political unions.

Hence it can be argued that the logic of social movement works as "generative mechanism" (Bhaskar 1978) for the ideational and organizational autonomy of labour action. Contrasting artisans' action of early 19th-century Britain with the collective action of skilled workers in the decades after around 1850 can further show this point. Historiographical sources allow us to argue that the logic of social movement faded away in the years 1850-90 *circa*. During this time period, skilled workers did not mount an antagonistic challenge to the power of industrialists in the new factories (see Joyce 1982 with reference to cotton spinners in Lancashire). Whilst speaking a language of conciliation and shared interests with their opponents, skilled workers ceased to link their conflict for the control over work organizations with a general critique of domination (Burgess 1975; A. Reid 1991). Trade unions consolidated as institutions after 1850, but they no longer conceived their mobilizations for universal franchise as a challenge to social power (McClelland 1987: 209; Harrison 1965). Such a decrease in the autonomy of labour action, as effect of the waning of the logic of social movement, can also be seen when considering labour representation in the political system. In the decades between 1850 and 1890 skilled workers, but also the newly-emerged unions in mining, did not strive to build independent political organizations, being satisfied with constituting one pressure group within the Liberal Party (Pugh 1993: 29; Beynon and Austrin 1994).

4 - <u>Autonomy and integration</u>

Among the "peculiarities of the British" Thompson highlights the autonomy of popular culture since the 18th century, with its support for a customary way of life and

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[11] As Rule argues (1986: 322), "no account of the rise of craft unionism in Britain which fails to see that the apprenticeship issue was a fundamental divide between the skilled trade unionists and their employers, whatever degree of 'accomodation' to the imperatives of the labour market might have been made, can come close to an understanding of the period".

"moral economy" (1993: 53 and 85). This was the outcome, on the one hand, of a polarizing process between the two cultural worlds of the gentlemen and the "poor"[12] and, on the other hand, of the Church losing command over the poor's "feasts and festivals and, with this, over a large area of plebeian culture" (ibidem: 73 and 50). Consequently, popular feasts were celebrated according to a secular calendar which had been created by the popular communities themselves, with also the guilds playing their part (ibidem: 51-2; 61). Many forms of people's cultural production "derived from their own experience and resources" flourished. The popular disturbances of the 18th century can also be explained as expression of this autonomous culture that the poor mobilized in order to resist the initiatives of change by landlords and commercial entrepreneurs (ibidem: 87 and 74-75).

When studying the early 19th century, Thompson also registers the emergence of a rational-"respectable" pole within plebeian culture, at the confluence of the Nonconformist and Jacobin traditions with the experience of urban artisans (see also Prothero 1979: 328); a process which can be *inter alia* associated with the rise of friendly societies (Thompson 1980: 458). Referring to the Radical artisans, Thompson argues: "the keynote of the auto-didact culture of the Twenties and early Thirties was moral sobriety. ... The Puritan character-structure underlies the moral earnestness and self-discipline which enabled men to work on candle-light after a day of labour" (1980: 811).

Within popular culture the rational pole developed alongside a "rough" pole. The latter can be defined, following Richard Johnson (1976: 49), as "a range of cultural responses that were resistant to capitalist imperatives and their corresponding values". They included "resistance to work disciplines, the defence of customary rights of relief, the practices of customary sports and pastimes, the equally traditional use of alcohol in sociability or need, the spending of hard-won wages on petty luxuries, the theft of property or the street life of adolescents" (ibidem). The more organized forms of the "rough" pole can be found in the London of the years leading to Chartism, prospering in the " 'male republic' of the alehouse club" (McCalman 1987: 316).[13] The "rough" pole of popular culture also included the "thieves, costermongers and lads" who also attended Chartist meetings in London, being particularly active during the repeated riots erupting during the 1830s and 1840s (Prothero 1969: 82 and 90).

What was remarkable about Chartist mobilizations is the fact that, as Dorothy Thompson puts it, "the rough and the respectable had to an extent worked together. ... In later years they became separated, even hostile" (D. Thompson 1984: 338). The integration within the same movement of artisans, on the one hand, and "the vast limbo of semi-employed labourers, casualized semi-skilled artisans, 'sweated' home

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[12] "The term 'poor' puts together paupers and fiercely-independent yeomen, small peasants, farm servants, rural artisans, and so on, in the same gentry-made category" (Thompson 1993: 17).

[13] Reference is made here to the "ultra-radical debating clubs". According to McCalman they, "were interested less in producing systematic political theory than a type of plebeian-populist rhetoric and theatre designed to impel action and debunk authority through shock, humour and pathos. Songs and ballads - one of the oldest forms of political expression among the English poor - featured conspicuoulsly at club meetings. ... Like seventeenth-century Ranters, ultras flaunted their roughness. Anyone who attended the Mulberry Tree well dressed was accused of being a spy" (1987: 321-2; 324).

workers, despised foreigners, tramps and beggars" (Stedman Jones 1983: 235), on the other hand, occurred through the political discourse of Radicalism, namely by identifying a common political opponent. [14] As Prothero argues, the 'mob' believed "the rich lived out of taxes, especially those on tobacco. The sum total of their principles was a hatred of authorities, the police and beaks. ... Mayhew was told that if there were a riot, every coster would seize a policeman" (1969: 90).

Thus integration among the empirical components of the movement in London did not occur through the social conflict which, as seen in section 3, artisans were structuring against their social opponents. However, the decline of the logic of social movement in craftsmen's collective action is decisive for explaining the disintegration of the popular movement in London during the second half of the 19th century. As Stedman Jones argues (1983: 215), "in the period between 1790 and 1850 it was this artisan class which had provided political leadership to the unskilled and the poor".

The decline in the collective action of skilled workers after 1850 was mentioned at the end of section 2. There reference was made to nation-wide unions such as the Amalgamated Society of Engineers and the Boilermakers' Society, and to the experience of the new "factory artisans", for instance in the growing sectors of shipbuilding and engineering in north-east England (Burgess 1975; Reid 1991, McClelland 1987). By decline it is meant the process by which the action of the heirs of the old millwright and shipwright lost autonomy, and their inability to structure antagonistic labour conflict. In London, the same waning of the logic of social movement was associated with a wide-ranging, albeit slow, process of economic decay of artisan activities, which brought about the "undermining of the distinctiveness and cohesion of the old artisan culture" (Stedman Jones 1983: 215). In an earlier essay than the his study on Chartism (ibidem: 179-238), Stedman Jones reconstructs these dynamics: "a few trades managed to maintain their traditions intact. The strongly unionized wet-coopers and silk-hatters, for instance, maintained control over apprenticeship and the work process and continued to express a strong sense of craft solidarity reinforced by traditional rituals of communal drinking and conviviality. But these trades were small and exceptional. The larger trades either declined in the face of provincial competition or else were broken up through the subdivision of the work process into separate semi-skilled trades. Silk-weaving, ship-building, watch-making and leather manufacture were examples of the first tendency; the clothing, footwear and furniture trades examples of the second". Confined to "a luxury market" by the "competition from the ready-made sector", West End craftsmen were progressively involved in "personal dealings with the rich", developing a deferential attitude typical of the patron-client relationship. Contributing to the process of dissolution of London trade communities were dynamics of urban change such as "the migration of the skilled working class to the suburbs", which became a "mass phenomenon from the 1870s", and the concomitant population decline of "old skilled

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[14] One can assume that the shoemakers acted as a bridge between the two poles of popular culture. Over-represented in the leadership of the London locals of the National Charter Association, they had "reputation for drunkenness and rowdiness" and "of being particularly irregular in their working hours" (Prothero 1969: 83 and 103-5; D. Thompson 1984: 180; see also E.P. Thompson 1980: 807).

artisan centres" such as Holborn and Finsbury. In the suburbs the local replaced the trade pub as the focal point of the workingman's leisure (ibidem: 213-20).

In mid- and late-Victorian London the decline of the logic of social movement in artisan action also meant the disintegration of the popular movement as a whole, with the concomitant loss of autonomy in its other empirical component. Stedman Jones shows how, in London, unskilled masses were engaged in the defense of their own cultural autonomy from the "evangelical and utilitarian attempts" of reform. However, this cultural autonomy did no longer sustain autonomous collective action. As Stedman Jones points out, the unorganized poor retreated into a "culture of consolation" and "political apathy", susceptible to be courted by Tory rowdyism and later jingoistic discourse (1983: 214-5 and 229-37).

The disintegration in the culture and collective action of popular strata during these decades has been noticed in general for Britain (Hinton 1983: 8). With particular reference to factories in north-east England, it meant an increasing distance in the collective action for the control of work organization between the organized skilled workers and the unskilled labourers (McClelland 1987). But it is in Lancashire that the links can be seen with utmost evidence between the decline of the logic of social movement in labour action, processes of political heteronomy and the disintegration of the popular movement. After about 1850, as Joyce (1982) shows, the weakening of factory spinners' and weavers' collective action entailed that working-class communities came to be enveloped into a web of paternalist/deferential practices, discouraging any sustained attempt at challenging domination. The autonomy of the Amalgamated Societies, not only of weavers but also of spinners, was low, as witnessed by the fact that employers were allowed to participate in their meetings (Joyce 1992: 419, note 21). Unable to organize the conflict for the control of work organization, cotton unions confined their activity to the bargaining over technically intricate wage-lists, being even unable to keep up wages to the growth in the productivity of the industry. Consequently trade union leadership was selected according to criteria of administrative competence rather than skills in the organization of conflict (Burgess 1975: 243 and 249). Paternalism also meant that millowners were able to exercize cultural control over their "hands", either in the Nonconformist guise of moral improvement or in the Tory style of "either patronage or warm permissiveness to the recreations of the people" (Joyce 1982: 138-42 and 182-90; Thompson 1993: 76, note 2). Unable to build independent organization at the level of the political system, cotton workers divided their political loyalties between their Liberal or Tory masters, who achieved an overwhelming dominance in local political systems (Joyce 1982: 4, 18, 98, 150 and 169).

Hopefully, this section has shown the link between the disintegration of the popular movement (and within popular culture) and the loss of autonomy in the collective action of popular strata, with regard to the second mid-19th century.[15] It has been

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[15] The decline of Chartism, as the outcome of a (political and cultural) disintegration and loss of autonomy in popular colletive action, is vividly reconstructed by Stedman Jones in one early essay (1983: 25-75). With reference to mid-century Oldham, he writes: "the changed political character of the working class [was] epitomized by the clearcut division between the labour aristocrat and the unskilled: a tightly interlocking collection of liberal nonconformist self-help institutions on the one hand; Orangeism, Toryism and the pub on the other. ... The working-class alliance broke up. The shop-keepers moved behind the

explained as the effect of the waning of the logic of social movement in artisan action, in the same way as, in sections 2 and 3, the emergence of antagonistic labour action was considered to be one decisive generative mechanism in the construction of the popular movement in early-19th century Britain. However, why the action of skilled workers lost the capacity to structure antagonistic labour conflict has been left unexplained, nor the other claim has been justified that the different empirical components of the popular movement culminating with Chartism were integrated through the political discourse of Radicalism. In order to explore both these issues, it is necessary to introduce the further notion of model of antagonistic conflict, which will be viewed as produced by the logic of social movement. This is an analytical construct but is as real as the concept of social movement, to the extent that the effects of its composition and decomposition can be shown over labour action and, through it, over more general processes within popular action. Furthermore, through systematically analysing the actual model of conflict that artisans had structured, the claim might be justified that Thompson's interpretation of the popular movement as class action is inaccurate. More importantly, the way is opened to argue for the actuality of different models of conflict in the history of the British labour movement, and for the possibility as well that subsequent logics of social movement might develop outside labour relations.

5 - <u>Models of conflict</u>

The emergence of a logic of social movement within artisan action was taken into consideration in section 3, where it was said to coexist with a logic of interests within labour action. The logic of interests can be explained through the structural conditions of stratification, especially in the availability of economic resources (cf. Archer 1995: 299), and involves an active stance of increasing them in competition with other interest groups (see sect. 1). But in order to explain the logic of social movement the reality of relations of domination must be presupposed. Given the empirical evidence on the relevant part played by <u>labour</u> <u>action</u> within the popular movement during 1790-1850 *circa*, the investigation has given prominence to labour relations, to the domination over work by its organizers and the control over investments by entrepreneurs.

In section 2 we mentioned Stedman Jones's criticism to the objectivist bias of both Marxist and sociological interpretations, on grounds that the latter would view the political orientation of the popular movement as determined by the social condition of its participants (Stedman Jones 1983: 21-2; 93-96). However, Stedman Jones's "rethinking" of Chartism cannot downplay the consistency, highlighted by Thompson, between the discourse and the action of the artisans on the one hand, and their living, material experience on the other, both in terms of interests - as defined in relation to the market, and of subordination. Nevertheless, both Thompson and S. Jones are at the

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Liberal candidate, whose platform also contained the demand for the disestablishment of the Church. The small masters fell in behind the Tory demand for factory legislation. Deserted by their petty-bourgeois allies, working-class activists were also gradually absorbed into the two bourgeois parties. By the early 1850s, the Chartists had been reduced to a small rump" (ibidem: 28 and 36).

same time agreed on the character of genuine emergence of autonomous popular action, in the sense that, while *a posteriori* we can explain the emergence of trade unionism through the analytical categories of interests and domination, nothing determined it before its invention by popular creativity.

Collective action thus makes a difference between the acceptance of the actuality of domination, or even the mere resistance to it (Scott 1990), and the attempt at contending for the control over a certain field of social relations, in this case work relations (Farro 2000). For instance, in the second half of the 19th century, engineers were engaged in a conflict for the control of work organisation against the industrialists, who intended to assert their "power to manage" on issues such as the link between performance and compensation, overtime and the allocation of jobs (cf. Burgess 1975: 38-9). However, the limits of skilled workers' collective action after 1850 *circa* also were mentioned in sections 3 and 4. The interpretation of this process as a decline from the antagonistic action of early-19th century artisans is justified on the basis of the empowering effect that the actuality of the logic of social movement has over collective action. This claim can be explained if we represent the logic of social movement according to the <u>model</u> of <u>antagonistic</u> <u>conflict</u> that it produces and, moreover, might show the internal coherence among its principles. This involves a "double hermeneutics" (cf. Bhaskar 1989: 55), which finds its empirical basis in the actual discourses articulated by leaders, activists and participants to collective action, and then relates them to a model of conflict, analysed according to its principles of a) identity, b) opposition and c) totality (Touraine: 1981; Farro et *al.* 2000).

It then becomes possible to relate the action of various groups of working people, over a certain time-span, to a model of antagonistic labour conflict, insofar as a continuity within the discourse of the different groups can be shown in relation to: a) the self-definition of the people involved; b) the identification of the social opponent at a general level (opponents in particular struggles are seen as instances of the opponent defined in general terms); c) a common critical discourse and an overall picture of the desired reconstruction of a society without domination, considered to be as the ultimate horizon towards which their particular struggles are viewed to head. This procedure has already been followed when reconstructing artisan action in section 3, but now our aim is to show the consistency between its three principles.

Regarding <u>identity</u>, Thompson's definition of class action as supported by a collectivist conception of political economy alternative to *laissez-faire*, as the collectivism of moral economy opposed to acquisitive individualism (Thompson 1980: 225; 462-3; 603), is unable to discriminate between the action of artisans and the action of workers during the 20th century (cf. also Hobsbawm 1984: 195-6), with their attempt to establish integration between the collective action of the skilled and the unskilled, both for the control of work organization and in the trade-union movement coordinated at a national level (see Touraine *at al.* 1987). In this respect, the unionization of unskilled workers since the late 1880s was decisive in creating the conditions for the development of a kind of collective action which could structure labour conflict in the name of the working class as a whole (Lovell 1985; Price 1986: 93 and 128). In fact, as far as artisan identity is concerned, the centrality of the issue of apprenticeship implied that the artisans' outlook, in their collective action at the level of labour relations, "was to avoid being 'sweated' into a proletariat along with the

expanding population of the unskilled" (Rule 1986: 299). Engaged in counteracting the deterioration of their condition, artisans were striving "to hold back the unskilled tide" (E.P. Thompson 1980: 285-6; see also p. 269). Hence the prevalence of the political language of Radicalism within the discourse of the popular movement taken as a whole - as asserted by Stedman Jones and Joyce (see sect. 2) -, can be explained on the grounds that the unorganized poor could not be integrated in the popular movement on the basis of trade identity and its labour conflict.[16] As Rule puts it, the consciousness of the tradesmen, "because it attempted to retain a frontier between the skilled and the unskilled ... could never develop naturally into a broad-based working class consciousness, ... but it was an historically specific labour consciousness ... which reflected the real experiences of artisans and seemed congruent with their traditional values" (Rule 1987: 118).

This brings us to the differences in the principle of <u>totality</u> between the model of artisan conflict and what should be properly defined as the model of class conflict, structured by labour action from the late 19th century. The main distinction concerns the standpoint respectively adopted by artisans and early-20th century workers towards the rationalization of the labour process. Two leaders of the later labour movement such as Tom Mann and Ernest Bevin shared a positive orientation towards the modernization of production, through the application of scientific and technical development, however different their political views and their conception of labour conflict might have been (on Mann's plans for the re-organization of the London docks, see Tsuzuki 1991: 91 and White 1991: 62-3; on Bevin cf. Weiler 1993: 17, 32, 50, 69, 74-5). Their critique of the domination of private industrialists was based on a prospective horizon where workers' control over investments would be associated with an increase in the rationalization of production. On the contrary, the artisans opposed the natural character of custom to the artificiality of economic change and industry, as they "asserted their unquestionable right to 'their quiet and exclusive use and enjoyment of their ... arts and trades' " (Stedman Jones 1983: 135; Joyce 1992: 32-4; Thompson 1980: 279). Similarly cotton factory workers criticized "over-production" and "unregulated improvements in machinery", with "the resolutions of the Bolton spinners during the Plug Strikes" of 1842 advocating "restrictions on all moving power" (Sykes 1982: 170).

Both the principles of identity and totality in the artisan model of conflict are congruent with the structural conditions in which craftsmen were placed, and particularly with the initiatives of change undertaken by the actors in control of investments, thus with the definition of the <u>opponent</u> in the model of conflict. As argued in section 3, change concerned primarily the labour market in the early-19th century, with the creation of a 'sweated sector', thus trying to circumvent, so to speak, rather than directly attack artisans' control of work organization (for a description of the latter, see Thompson 1993: 371-7; Behagg 1990: 127). Consequently, as Stedman Jones makes clear, the picture of the innovating employer drawn by the artisans is *not*

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[16] The diffidence towards the unskilled comes forth unequivocally in the artisans' utopias. James Morrison, who "gave to ideas of co-operative production and exchange advanced by Owen, a harder edge of class hostility", advocated the claim "that ultimately the affairs of the country would be governed by the producers of wealth associated in their crafts, and delegating to a 'parliament of trades' ". Yet, he was also convinced that "the ignorant mass of the unskilled would be better controlled within a hierarchical union structure than they would be if simply given the vote" (Rule 1986: 304-5).

one in which "the role of the employer as manager and controller of the process is a crucial feature of its exploitative character" (ibidem: 137; see also E.P. Thompson 1980: 856). Their opponent was "the merchant organiser of domestic production" or of "the great warehouses selling slop clothing, shoes and furniture" in London (Rule 1987: 117; Prothero 1971: 207). "That he performed no manufacturing function helped to identify this form of capitalist as 'parasitic' and 'non productive' " (Rule 1987: 117). Hence the attraction of the Radical discourse for the artisans, because "the fundamental conflict was not [represented as] between employed and employers, but between the working classes and the idle classes". It was, in the 1834 words of a movement leader, "a war of honest industry against idle profligacy", with the latter definition including, together with the middleman denounced as interloper (Stedman Jones 1983: 143; E.P. Thompson 1980: 856-7), the landed aristocracy and the political elite.

In early-19th century Britain, however, the artisans maintained their social utopia (see E.P. Thompson 1980: 887), which was their specific contribution to the discourse of the popular movement as a whole. As has been noticed, "it was artisan groups like tailors, shoemakers and building craftsmen who could envisage the carrying on of their trade in a manner which made large non-productive capitalists unnecessary. ... A future of co-operative production was essentially one in which the artisan would recover his status, his pride, his well-being and his independence: the just reward of the special property of skilled labour which he possessed" (Rule 1986: 292 and 296). Therefore the consistency between the principles of identity, opposition and totality in the artisan model of conflict sustained a labour conflict which was conceived of as antagonistic.

But this model decomposed in the second half of the nineteenth century. As hinted above, industrialists' activity of change in the new factories aimed more to control work organization than the labour market. In engineering their initiatives did not consist in a new wave of technological change until the late decades of the century. However, they aimed to discipline factory artisans, to render their performance more systematic and to wrest from trade unionists the control over working time and the allocation of jobs (McClelland 1987: 183; Zeitlin 1985). Consistently, skilled workers' collective action changed its definition of the opponent. As McClelland argues with regard to engineers and shipyard workers in north-east England, "the chief enemy" now became "primarily the direct employer of labour" (ibidem: 195).

The general discourse developed by skilled workers also changed, because they now accepted the new worldview of progress as propounded by their employers, agreeing that "the factory was 'rational' and 'progressive' " (Joyce 1992: 61 and 109). Thus the ASE policy made "no overt attempts to oppose the introduction of labour-saving machines" (Burgess 1975: 18), which is understandable in the case of engineers, the trade in charge of building the new machines. More striking is the fact that male weavers (and their sons) overcame, or were forced by circumstances to overcome, their traditional aversion to factory work (Thompson 1980: 337-8; Berg 1980: ch. 10; Joyce 1982: 9 and 57-8). In one mill in Blackburn they even joined their (Tory) employer in toasting to the 'Six Motive Powers' (Joyce 1982: 182). Workers accepted the change brought about by technological development, but were deprived of the critical argument upholding their general challenge in the early century. The collective

action of engineers and shipbuilders on Tyneside was not stifled by paternalist-style domination like the action of Lancashire cotton workers. Yet their leaders were incapable of conceiving their particular mobilizations as moments of a general conflict. Thus Robert Knight, the leader of the Boilermakers' Society, could view as the cause for the occurrence of strikes the absence of gentlemanly feelings among employers, some of whom "were not morally fit for the important post of captains of industry" (quoted in McClelland 1987: 195).

Faced with changes both in the definition of the opponent and in the principle of totality, skilled workers reproduced the old identity of the trade in their conflict for the control of work organization. But, on the one hand, their consequent refusal to coordinate collective action at this level with the unskilled, and, on the other hand, their inability to articulate a critique of industrial progress as controlled by their opponents, produced inconsistency within the model of labour conflict, the waning of the logic of social movement and the ensuing disempowering of popular collective action.
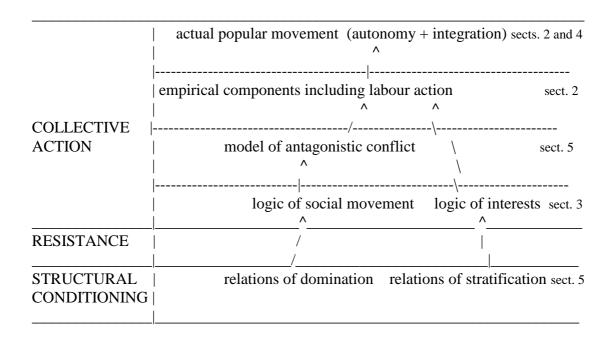
Table 1 - DEVELOPMENT OF THE ARGUMENT

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                   |    actual popular movement  (autonomy + integration) sects. 2 and 4
                   |                                    ^
                   |-------------------------------------|------------------------------------
                   | empirical components including labour action              sect. 2
                   |                                 ^           ^
COLLECTIVE         |-------------------------------------/--------------\----------------------
ACTION             |          model of antagonistic conflict       \          sect. 5
                   |                            ^                     \
                   |-------------------------|-----------------------------\--------------------
                   |              logic of social movement    logic of interests  sect. 3
                   |                         ^                           ^
RESISTANCE         |                        /                           |
_____|_____/_____|_____
STRUCTURAL         |          relations of domination   relations of stratification sect. 5
CONDITIONING       |
_____|_____
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Table 2 - MODELS OF LABOUR CONFLICT IN BRITAIN

	1790-1850	1850-90	1890-1930
kind of conflict	antagonistic	non-antagonistic	antagonistic (institutionalized)
IDENTITY	trade	trade	class
OPPOSITION	capitalist interloper	industrialist	industrialist (financial capital)
general discourse	defense trade customs	defense trade customs and progress	progress
TOTALITY ultimate horizon	self-managed production and distribution	shared interests and conciliation	workers' power (economic and industrial democracy)
kind of critique	moral	moral	social

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